Increase in the Incidence of Child Labour

1033. SHRI NARENDRA MOHAN: Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state:

(a) whether incidence of child labour has been on the increase in our country recently, especially in the unorganised sectors;

(b) if so, what are the reasons for this sudden increase;

(c) what steps are proposed to eliminate this child exploitation in any form in India or Indian children in other countries; and

(d) whether Government propose to change the laws to correct the situation and eliminate the problem?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR (SHRI M.P. VEERENDRA KUMAR): (a) and (b) As per the 1991 census, the total number of working children was of the order of 11.28 million as against a figure of 13.6 million as per 1981 census. Bulk of the children is engaged in agriculture and allied employment like cultivation, livestock, forestry and fisheries. There is no evidence to show that the incidence of child labour has increased recently.

(c) Under the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 the employment of children is prohibited in 7 occupations and 18 processes contained in Part A and B of the Schedule to the Act. there are also legal provisions in various other labour laws safeguarding the interests of working children. Apart from legal measures Government have taken steps for withdrawal and rehabiliation of Child labour working in hazardous occupations. So far, 1.05 lakh children have been enrolled in the special school for their rehabilitation. The Supreme Court of India has also given a number of directions recently with a view to address the problem. Government have already taken steps for implementation of the directions of the Supreme Court. These measures have been taken to address the problem of working children in the country. Rules do not permit emigration for those below 18 years, going abroad for work.

(d) Some suggestions have been made for amendment to the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986 to make it more effective. These suggestions would be taken into account while finalising the amendment proposal.

Review of the EPF Pension Scheme

1034. SHRI J. CHITHARANJAN: Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have taken any steps to review the EPF Pension Scheme, after completion of one year of its implementation; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR (SHRI M.P. VEERENDRA KUMAR): (a) and (b) As provided under paragraph 32 of the Employees' Pension Scheme, 1995, the Employees Provident Fund Organisation on 4.10.96 was asked to make annual valuation of the Pension Fund through the Actuary of the Organisation. The Employees Provident Fund Organisation have informed they have engaged the Actuary & given him all the required data for further action.

Purchase of Polar Bear-II from USA

1035. SHRI S. MUTHU MANI: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government spent over Rs. 112.30 lakhs on the Polar Bear-II vehicle which was received in a damaged condition.

(b) whether the American Company from which the said vehicle was purchased, refused to carry out repairs on it stating that damage was not covered under the warranty.

(c) if so, whether the damage caused was actually not covered under the warranty; and

(d) what is the present status of the said vehicle stating whether it is in good working condition or it required further repairs?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION AND THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI JAYANATHI NATARAJAN): (a) The Department of Ocean Development (DOD) spent Rs. 112.30 lakhs for procuring Polar Bear-II vehicle for operation in Antarctica. This vehicle was taken delivery ex-works (USA) in good condition by the authorised shipping agent of the Ministry of Surface Transport on behalf of DOD. During trans-shipment from USA to South Africa for onward shipment to Antarctica, the vehicle suffered minor damages such as 'crack on the front left glass, a crumple in left cabin door with side mirror bracket set back, left door vertical and top horizontal handrails scratched, left door access ladder set-in, left side engine compartment set-in and engine hatched distorted, front fender scratched, left control penel bulged out" This has been certified at South Africa by (a) Independent Marine Surveyor, (b) the Master of the Russian Ship 'Mikhail Somov' and (c) M/s Combine Ocean, the handling agent at Cape Town. These damages were cosmetic in nature and had not impaired the actual working of the vechicle. In fact, on reaching Antarctica, the vehicle was certified serviceable by the station commander and thereafter deployed with payload of 20 KL fuel tank, on a trailor in the first convoy from Shelf to the Indian station 'Maitri'. After covering about 70 km of the convoy route the vehicle broke down due to main axle failure which is attributed to sudden overload/drop of the vehicle.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) As the cause of the damage was due to 'dynamic overload followed by mechanical failure' the same is not covered under warranty.

(d) The vehicle requires repairs.

Right to Information

1036. SHRI NARENDRA MOHAN: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are thinking of empowering all the citizens to seek information on the functioning of all public authorities in the country;

(b) if so, whether the existing policy of Government regarding classification of documents will not come in the way;

(c) what would be the modalities for seeking such an information by a common man; and

(d) whether there will be quick remedial measures in case such an information is refused?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION AND THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI JAYANTHI NATARAJAN): (a) to (d) with a view to introduce greater transparency and openness in functioning of Government and public bodies, the Government had constituted a Working Group on "Right to Information and Promotion of Open and Transparent Government" under the Chairmanship of Shri H. D. Shourie. The Working Group has submitted its report to the Government on the 21st May, 1997. It has prepared for consideration of the Government a draft "Freedom of Information Bill". In order to ensure that flow of information to the public is not impended by other laws and rules, the Group has recommended amendments to section 5 of the Official Secrets Act, 1923, Sections 123 and 124 of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 together with consequential amendments in the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908 and in the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, Rule 11 of the CCS (Conduct) Rules, 1964 and the